



Wildfire Frequently Asked Questions

Regarding Building Codes, Permit Process and Fire Prevention in the Unincorporated
Area of San Diego County
November 5, 2003

**DO NOT START ANY CLEAN UP IN THE UNINCORPORATED AREA
OF THE COUNTY UNTIL YOU HAVE BEEN CLEARED BY A
COUNTY DAMAGE ASSESSMENT TEAM.
YOU COULD JEOPARDIZE YOUR FEMA OR INSURANCE CLAIMS.
TO CHECK ON YOUR ASSESSMENT CALL (866) 402-6044.**

If someone's home has been destroyed where can they get information about rebuilding?

- The County has established a hotline number for emergency fire questions. The **hotline number is 1-866-402-6044 or 1-858-495-5494**. Staff will be answering these numbers and will make themselves readily available for any fire related calls.
- In addition to the hotline number the public can call the Department of Planning and Land Use (DPLU) San Marcos office at (760) 471-0730, the El Cajon office at (619) 441-4030, the Ruffin Road office at (858) 565-5920, or the toll free number (888) 336-7553.
- If someone is planning to rebuild they may also want to read the DPLU brochure title "How to Obtain a Building Permit." A summary version is available on the Department's web site at www.sdcdplu.org or the full version may be obtained at any of the DPLU offices.

When a home is rebuilt must it be built in compliance with current building codes?

Yes, the buildings must be constructed according to current codes in effect at the time the permit is issued for the reconstruction.

If the Cedar, Paradise, or Dulzura/Mine (Otay) fires have destroyed someone's home how can the County help?

- The County will provide **plan review and issue building permits at no cost** for anyone whose home has been destroyed by a fire.
- In addition, the County will **expedite processing of building permit applications**.

- **An appointment is strongly recommended to submit plans** but DPLU has committed to working over-time to accommodate the needs of fire victims.
- Also, DPLU can assist homeowners with questions about how to prepare plans, provide information on the permitting process, and how to rebuild using more fire-resistive construction methods.

I know I need a building permit to rebuild my home, what is the permitting process?

- First you should have someone prepare building plans and then submit the plans at either the Ruffin Road or San Marcos offices.
- Be sure to identify yourself as a fire victim.
- County staff will expedite the plan review and call you when the plan review has been completed.
- The corrections must then be made to the original drawings and the plans resubmitted to the County for approval.
- When all corrections have been approved the permit will be issued.
- Once the permit is issued you may begin construction.
- Each stage of the construction must be inspected before covering it with building materials.
- For more detailed information on permit processing please read the DPLU brochure title "How to Obtain a Building Permit." A summary version is available on the Department's web site at www.sdcplu.org.

Does the County of San Diego keep home plans on file for existing homes?

Typically the County does not keep plans for residential buildings on file. However, the county may have plans if the dwelling passed final inspection within the last 90 days or is part of a developer-built subdivision. In the weeks following the fire DPLU Building Division staff will research permit records for all parcels in the unincorporated area damaged by the fire. In most cases the property owner will need to consult with a professional to have new plans prepared.

Is a Demolition Permit required to remove a building that was damaged or destroyed by the fire?

No, the County will waive the requirement for a demolition permit; however, **do not start any clean up in the unincorporated area of the county until you have been cleared by a County Damage Assessment Team.** You could jeopardize your FEMA or insurance claims. To check on your assessment call (866) 402-6044. For your safety please check with SDG&E to be sure all utilities have been properly shut off before beginning demolition and clean up.

What if a property owner wants to rebuild a different home than the one that was destroyed?

The County will credit the homeowner for the floor area that legally existed before the fire. For instance, if the original home was 2,000 square feet and the owner wanted to rebuild a 3,000 square foot home, the County would calculate the fee for both and charge the difference between the two fees (i.e. Fee = \$2377 - \$1927 = \$450).

If someone is rebuilding a home that was destroyed by the fire are they required to pay school and park fees when they obtain their building permit?

No, DPLU has discussed this issue with the school district and the Parks Department and both agreed that fees would not be charged to rebuild structures. They will need to pay for the difference in floor area if the replacement structure is larger than the existing.

Can someone live in a trailer on their property while they are rebuilding a home that was destroyed by fire?

Yes, provided the County of San Diego DPLU has issued an Emergency Temporary Occupancy Permit (ETOP) for the trailer. The County will not charge a fee for this permit when someone's home has been destroyed by the firestorm. The permit may be obtained at any time and will be valid for 12 months from the date of the fire. In order to obtain an ETOP permit the customer must provide a completed permit application including Assessor parcel number. An application can be obtained by calling one of the above listed office numbers. ETOP trailers must connect sewage drain lines to the existing septic system or a holding tank with frequent pump service

If my home is on a septic system may I using the existing septic system?

- Yes, the County will waive fees for fire re-builds, located on the same foundation, and with the same number of bedrooms as the destroyed structure. If the new building will be located significantly outside the original foundation footprint and/or with additional bedrooms or plumbing the Department of Environmental Health (DEH) will need to review the project and DEH fees may apply.
- Harrison Park re-builds will be case-by-case and should be discussed with DEH staff first.

If my home is on a well do I need to have the well tested?

Testing is not required. However, if the well was opened or disturbed in any way DEH strongly suggests that owners of buildings served by individual water wells, have the well tested for potability prior to re-occupancy of the permanent dwelling.

What kind of roofing is allowed on homes in the unincorporated area of the County?

The County requires a **Class A roofing** on all new dwellings and on repairs or re-roofs when more than 50% of the roof is replaced. The class A rating is the most fire resistive class of roofing material and is commonly tile or asphalt composition shingles.

What clearing is allowed by the County for fire prevention purposes around existing buildings?

The County allows 100 feet of clearing around existing dwelling units. The cleared area should be landscaped with fire resistant plants. Any additional clearing for fire prevention, control or suppression purposes can be done when authorized or required in writing by a fire prevention or suppression agency. Additional information regarding County regulations related to clearing can be found in the Grading Ordinance beginning at section 87.501. A copy of the Grading Ordinance can be downloaded at: <http://www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dpw/docs/propgradord.pdf>

Are any permits required to clear up to 100 feet away from an existing residence?

NO. Clearing for fire protection purposes can be done within 100-feet of existing dwelling units without a permit.

If a building permit has been issued for a proposed building, is an additional Clearing Permit required to clear?

No. Clearing and grading, which are exempt from a grading permit (if less than 200 cubic yards and cut & fill less than 8 feet), DO NOT require an additional County Clearing Permit provided they are incidental to the repair, alteration, or construction of a proposed structure with an approved building permit. The **building permit authorizes** the construction to begin and that includes **clearing the building site**. However, property owners must use caution regarding what is cleared and how the clearing is done. **All disturbed earth will be required to have erosion control measures installed** in accordance with County stormwater pollution prevention standards.

Who is responsible for clearing the brush from around buildings?

The property owner.

Who enforces the regulations regarding clearance of brush from around buildings?

The **Fire Agencies enforce weed abatement** programs that require clearing of flammable vegetation from around buildings.

Is the property owner required to obtain environmental approval prior to fire clearing around an existing structure?

- No, not for clearing up to 100 feet from an existing dwelling unit
- Clearing around other structures may be permitted on a case-by-case basis. Contact the Zoning Information Counter at (858) 565-5981 for more information.
- The **type of equipment** used for clearing **is not regulated**.
- **Where biological open space or conservation easements exist, clearing is allowed in the easements only by written order of the Fire Marshall and typically allows only selective removal of vegetation.**

Are buildings required to be constructed with fire resistive materials?

Only on new construction where there is less than a 100-foot distance from the existing natural vegetation.

Can a house be re-built on a fire-damaged foundation?

Applicants who wish to use the existing foundation systems must have a "suitability analysis" of the existing foundation performed by a registered civil or structural engineer. This analysis shall state that the engineer has visited the site and investigated the condition of the existing building elements.

It shall also state that the remaining foundation is suitable for the support of the new structure, and that all under-slab utility systems (such as drain, waste, vent, water, mechanical, electrical, etc.) are suitable for continued use. Electrical conduits may remain but all underslab electrical conductors must be replaced.

Applicants who choose to demolish the slab/foundation system will need to provide a compaction report to address re-compaction of the lot after slab removal if soil was disturbed to a depth greater than 12 inches. A licensed geotechnical or civil engineer must prepare the compaction report.

Where can the public find out more information about fire prevention?

- The County Department of Planning and Land Use has informational brochures on fire resistive landscaping, creating defensible space, building a fire resistive home, and installing water storage tanks. Much of this information can be found on the DPLU web site.
http://www.co.san-diego.ca.us/cnty/cntydepts/landuse/fire_resistant.html
- The DPLU phone number for fire prevention is (858) 565-5920 or (888) 336-7553.